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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000284

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SUBJECT: NINEWA: MOSUL UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT PROPOSES BROAD
TIES WITH PRT

REF: A. 06BAGHDAD 4504

1B. 07BAGHDAD 2730

1C. BAGHDAD 244

Classified By: NINEWA PRT LEADER JASON HYLAND: 1.4 (B) AND (D)

This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

11. (S/REL ACGU) Summary: Mosul University President Dr. Obay al-Dewachi told us he was open to broad cooperation with the PRT. Although the university was a bastion of the Ba'athist system and is a known safe haven for terrorists, as one of the best universities in Iraq the PRT will begin immediately a cautious but broad and sustained engagement. Support for its development as a vibrant and politically moderate institution could bring enormous benefits to the economy, civil society and political environment in northern Iraq.
End Summary.

12. (SBU) Mosul University President Dr. Obay al-Dewachi told PRT Leader and staff January 22 that the university was open to broad cooperation with the PRT to help his institution recover from the many challenges it faced over the past five years. He repeatedly invited the PRT Leader to visit the university, an offer which, for the last year, he had been reluctant to extend to any Americans. He said the security situation at the university had improved and specifically identified the need for cooperation with the medical and engineering faculties, which he called the core of the university. He noted that the university had prepared a former regime palace on a campus that offers excellent security for meetings.

13. (SBU) The 30,000 student university is the most important institution of higher education in Ninewa and one of the best universities in Iraq. It is also a university where Sunni Arabs in particular feel safe attending. Dr. Obay identified post-graduation employment for students as one of the most pressing issues, along with security. The meeting was made possible through the good offices of Turkish Consul General Huseyin Botsali, who maintains good relations with Dr. Obay and the university generally. The Dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine, Dr. Fouad Kasim Mohammad, also attended the luncheon. The PRT will begin immediately a cautious but broad and sustained engagement with Mosul University since support for its development as a vibrant and politically moderate institution could bring enormous benefits to the economy, civil society and political environment in northern Iraq.

University Academics -
Continuing Despite the Challenges

¶ 14. (U) Mosul University began in 1959 with the founding of the College of Medicine and was incorporated in 1967. It consists of 22 faculties or colleges and 126 departments spanning the full range of humanities, sciences, and engineering. Mosul University has several research centers, including one focused on the Mosul Dam. The three main campuses are in eastern Mosul with the College of Medicine based separately in a teaching hospital. Dr. Obay discussed plans for a new campus near Mosul Airport, close to Forward Operating Base Marez, on which the PRT is located. CG Botsali said it may come under the Mosul University umbrella. The 30,000 students pursue a mix of undergraduate, graduate and professional degrees. The majority of the professoriate has doctorates and has studied regionally and internationally. There are approximately 700 full professors and over 2,000 instructors.

¶ 15. (U) Dr. Obay (who speaks very good English and was educated in Europe, see BIONOTE REF B) was extremely focused on getting cooperation for the Medical and Engineering Colleges, which are the nexus of both the university's prestige and its contribution to building a new Iraq. He said the university is trying to upgrade the computer and laboratory facilities of the two Colleges as well as the Departments of Chemistry and Physics. Dr. Fouad said essential laboratory supplies such as glassware and cadavers are in critically short supply. Access to current technical reference and research publications is poor university-wide. Electricity shortages limit teaching hours. CG Botsali volunteered to have two large American-donated generators converted from natural gas to diesel. Mosul University is regarded with great prestige and respect within the Iraqi

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academic community, especially the faculties of Medicine and Engineering. Dr. Fouad talked about elements of normal life at the university such as athletic competitions and chess tournaments. The university was also the site of a recent art exhibition by a prominent local artist.

University Politics -
Tangled and Potentially Dangerous

¶ 16. (S/REL ACGU) The university was a bastion of the Ba'athist system and over the last four years it has become increasingly difficult for non-Sunni Arabs to study and work there. Though all of the Kurdish and Yezidi students (REF B) and most of the faculty are no longer able to come on campus because of threats of violence, Dr. Obay claimed some Christian students still prefer Mosul University to universities in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Kurdish political parties have claimed there is a vocal Wahabi minority among the students recruiting for radical Islamist activities. The university is a known safe haven for terrorists who pose as and intimidate real students (REFTELS). Military colleagues tell us the Department of Chemistry is actively assisting terrorism on a tactical level. Nevertheless, Dr. Obay repeatedly insisted that there should be no place for politics at the university.

PRT/University Cooperation Ready to Move Forward

¶ 17. (C) The PRT's Health and Education Section had already been working with Dr. Fouad to provide linkages with American universities. (Bio Note: Dr. Fouad speaks fluent Arabic, Turkish and English. His PhD is from the University of Missouri; his brother still lives there.) On a more immediate note, the PRT arranged for the donation and delivery of textbooks to the Veterinary and Nursing colleges. Through one of USAID's implementing partners, the PRT is pioneering a program to partner with the Veterinary College (sensitive information). The USAID partner is upgrading the College's

computer labs and providing internet access while the College will provide veterinarians and students to assist in IRD programs across Ninewa province. As the relationships develop, the PRT will move forward with a full range of engagements including through USAID, Public Diplomacy, QRF and ad-hoc associations with American academic institutions. Dr. Obay particularly praised the University of Hawaii's ongoing assistance to the College of Agriculture.

Comment

¶8. (S/REL ACGU) Dr. Obay has made such overtures before, but security concerns have previously overtaken events. He is also not the most reliable interlocutor. During a January 27 meeting with Prime Minister's Advisor Zuhair Al-Chalabi and Ninewa Provincial Governor to discuss follow-up to the recent explosion in Mosul (ref c), Al-Chalabi said in a side conversation that Dr. Obay is "not cooperative" with the central government, and both he and the Governor alleged that he cooperates with terrorists and said he needs to be replaced. Despite the difficult environment, the PRT is now cautiously optimistic that a quiet and measured engagement strategy is worth the effort in order to help turn this vital institution into a positive force for change not only for Ninewa but for Sunni Arabs in Iraq. We believe that the majority of the students and professors are sympathetic to an academically-focused, non-political vision for the university's future. The security challenges are significant, but Mosul University is just too important to leave to terrorists and former Ba'athists. The Turkish assistance is greatly appreciated; at the invitation of the Turkish Consul General, the PRT may use the Turkish Consulate General as a meeting place for some future meetings, as a good neutral location.

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